

## **Local Resistance to Climate Change Adaptation: The Case of Ponta Baleia, São Tomé and Príncipe**

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## Local resistance to climate change adaptation: The case of Ponta Baleia, São Tomé and Príncipe



## Resistência local para a adaptação à mudança climática: O caso de Ponta Baleia, São Tomé e Príncipe

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## Front cover images:

- **Left:** Free-roaming pigs in Ponta Baleia, which were central to the dispute between the residents and adaptation project staff. Source: Lead author's personal archive.
- **Right:** Warming Stripes representing (from left to right) annual average temperatures for São Tomé and Príncipe from 1901-2019 compared to the reference period of 1971-2000. Source: [showyourstripes.info](http://showyourstripes.info), n.d.

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# Executive summary

## Study background and approach

There is a widely recognized need for effective adaptation strategies in low and middle-income countries (LMICs) in general, and in natural-resource-dependent communities in particular (Adger et al., 2007). Yet, research has shown that adaptation is an intrinsically political process riddled with power inequalities at different levels of decision-making (Eriksen et al., 2015; Mikulewicz, 2018; Nightingale, 2015) which, in certain cases, can lead to local tensions and conflicts. In this report, we summarize the findings of the research project titled *Investigating local resistance to climate change adaptation: Climate injustice in São Tomé and Príncipe* funded by The Carnegie Trust for the Universities of Scotland (RIG007851). The study critically analyzed the resistance of Ponta Baleia – a small rural community in São Tomé and Príncipe (STP) – to an adaptation project led by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the national government. The study's goal was to unveil the causes, dynamics and consequences of the project's overall failure to increase local adaptive capacity and to propose recommendations for preventing similar conflicts around adaptation and development in the future.

Resistance in LMICs to the idea of development as interpreted by international actors is not a new phenomenon, but little is known about it in the context of adaptation to climate change. The evidence presented in this report suggests that the people of Ponta Baleia possess an "oppositional consciousness" (Katz, 2004), which they mobilized to remedy the fundamental inequality between them and project managers in the context of project design and implementation. In order to analyze this conflict, we relied on an analytical approach rooted in climate justice (Anderson, 2013; Jafry et al., 2019), which stresses the necessity to address the needs of people most vulnerable to climate change impacts while also affording them increased agency and control over their own adaptations (Anderson, 2013; Jafry et al., 2019). Climate justice is a concept of increasing importance in both climate studies and adaptation praxis, not least due to its suitability to analyze the highly uneven nature of the adaptive process which must be duly considered to ensure the long-term success of any planned or autonomous adaptation strategy (Mikulewicz, 2020).

## Methods and study sites

The study adopted a qualitative approach to answering the research questions. It involved fieldwork in STP conducted by the lead author over a period of 11 days (23 February to 5 March 2019), which included three site visits to Ponta Baleia. A total of 17 interviews were conducted with Ponta Baleia residents, UNDP staff members, government officials and representatives of NGOs working in the country. Two small gender-disaggregated focus groups with Ponta Baleia residents (with 2 men and 3 women, respectively) were also conducted. This was supplemented by data obtained as part of the lead author's doctoral fieldwork in STP in early 2016, which involved

# Sumário executivo

## Contexto e abordagem da pesquisa

Há uma necessidade muito grande para os países de renda média e baixa terem estratégias de adaptação que possam ser efetivas e adotadas, principalmente nas comunidades dependentes de recursos naturais (Adger et al., 2007). Ainda assim, pesquisas têm mostrado que adaptação é um processo intrinsecamente político, onde se encontra cheio de poder de desigualdades à todos possíveis níveis que demandam decisões (Eriksen et al., 2015; Mikulewicz, 2018; Nightingale, 2015) que, em muitos casos, podem levar às tensões e conflitos locais. Neste relatório, haverá um resumo dos resultados encontrados na pesquisa de projeto chamado *Investigando resistências locais para a adaptação à mudança climática: Injustiça climática em São Tomé e Príncipe* (Investigating local resistance to climate change adaptation: Climate injustice in São Tomé and Príncipe) fundado pelo Fundo de Carnegie para as Universidades da Escócia (The Carnegie Trust for the Universities of Scotland, RIG007851). O estudo demonstra uma análise crítica da resistência de Ponta Baleia, uma comunidade pequena e rural em São Tomé e Príncipe (STP) – para um projeto de adaptação desenvolvido pelo Programa de Desenvolvimento das Nações Unidas (PNUD) e governo nacional juntos. O objetivo deste estudo foi revelar as causas, dinâmicas e consequências do fracasso do projeto em salientar e melhorar o nível de capacidade adaptativa local, e propôr recomendações que possam prevenir conflitos similares na área de adaptação e desenvolvimento no futuro.

Resistência local ao desenvolvimento é um fenômeno comum dentro dos países de renda média e baixa. Porém, pouco é discutido dentro do contexto de resistência para a adaptação à mudança climática. No relatório, esta evidência nos revela que os residentes de Ponta Baleia possuem o que é chamado de "consciência oposicional" (Katz, 2004), o que mobilizaram para abordar a desigualdade entre os residentes e gerentes na concepção e implementação do projeto. Para entender mais sobre este conflito, foi preciso considerar métodos analíticos que estão nas raízes da justiça climática (Anderson, 2013; Jafry et al., 2019), o que nos acentua a importância de resolver as necessidades das pessoas vulneráveis aos impactos da mudança climática, enquanto, damos a capacidade para os indivíduos agirem independentemente e fazerem escolhas próprias para a adaptação (Anderson, 2013; Jafry et al., 2019). Justiça climática é um conceito de relevância crescente com os estudos climáticos assim como as práticas de adaptação. Como tal, a justiça climática é adequada para analisar os níveis desiguais do processo adaptativo, que devem ser devidamente considerados para garantir o sucesso a longo prazo de qualquer estratégia de adaptação, tanto planejada quanto autônoma (Mikulewicz, 2020).

## Métodos e contexto local

O estudo adotou o método qualitativo para responder as questões da pesquisa. Foi desenvolvido um trabalho de campo em São Tomé e Príncipe conduzido pelo autor principal pelo período de 11 dias (23 de Fevereiro até 5 de Março de 2019), que incluiu três visitas para a Ponta Baleia. Foram feitas no

42 interviews with practitioners and members of another local community participating in the same adaptation project. All primary data was supplemented by secondary data, including both internal and publicly available documents regarding the village of Ponta Baleia, the local climate, the adaptation project and development governance in the country.

STP is a small island nation of over 210,000 people located in the Gulf of Guinea with an economy that is highly reliant on primary exports. The country currently deals with a range of development challenges related to health, education, and high levels of poverty (UNDP, 2014). Classified by the United Nations (UN) as a Least Developed Country (LDC) and a Small Island Developing State (SIDS), STP is also considered highly vulnerable to climate change impacts. Examples include droughts, storm surges, flash floods, and sea-level rise (INDC, 2015).

Ponta Baleia is a small rural community located in Caué, the most sparsely inhabited district of the country with a population of over 7,500 (INE, 2018). In terms of local livelihoods, residents rely on rain-fed agriculture, animal husbandry (mostly free-roaming pigs and chickens), fishing, palm wine production, small trade, and services. The community faces a range of development and environmental challenges related to local housing, energy, water provision, sanitation, food security, education, transport, and public health. The vast majority of residents live in what could be described as deep poverty. With regards to local environmental and climate impacts, residents frequently complain about increasing intensity of flood events, to which Ponta Baleia is particularly vulnerable due to its geographic location on a steep volcanic slope near the coast. Similarly, there is no drainage system, meaning that flood- and rainwater become trapped in the village center, increasing the risk of diarrhea, malaria and other waterborne diseases. There have also been reports of landslides in the local area.

The adaptation project titled *Enhancing capacities of rural communities to pursue climate resilient livelihood options in São Tomé and Príncipe districts of Caué, Mé-Zóchi, Príncipe, Lembá, Cantagalo, and Lobata (CMPLCL)* was a partnership between UNDP and the national government, and aimed to increase the resilience of rural livelihoods to climate impacts in a total of 30 local communities in six districts of STP. This was to be achieved by strengthening the capacity of national institutions in the context of climate risk management, introducing climate-proof infrastructure and resilience-enhancing livelihood practices, and implementing various adaptation strategies at the community level.

### Conflict overview

The dispute between the residents of Ponta Baleia and adaptation project staff erupted when, following rapid participatory appraisals, UNDP proposed the construction of pigsties to increase local incomes and address the environmental health risks associated with unfenced livestock roaming freely in the village. However, community members indicated that this did not overlap with the community's development priorities – in this case the decrepit state of local

total, 17 entrevistas, com os residentes da Ponta Baleia, membros do PNUD, membros do governo e representantes de organizações não governamentais (ONGs) presentes no país. Houve também foco com grupos de gêneros desagregados (com 2 homens e 3 mulheres, respectivamente). Esta pesquisa foi complementada pelos dados obtidos como parte do trabalho de campo em São Tomé e Príncipe pelo autor principal no começo de 2016, que teve como envolvimento 42 entrevistas com participantes e membros de uma outra comunidade local que participara do mesmo projeto de adaptação. Todos os dados primários foram suplementados por dados secundários, incluindo dois tipos de documentos: tanto publicáveis quanto internos, que tratam-se da comunidade de Ponta Baleia, o seu clima, o projeto de adaptação e a governança de desenvolvimento no país.

São Tomé e Príncipe é uma pequena ilha nação que conta com mais de 210.000 residentes localizados no Golfo de Guiné com uma economia que é altamente constituída por exportação. No momento, o país lida com uma parcela de desafios de desenvolvimento que estão diretamente ligadas com a saúde, educação e níveis altos de pobreza (UNDP, 2014). Classificado pelas Nações Unidas como um Pequeno Estado Insular em Desenvolvimento (PEID) e como um país subdesenvolvido, São Tomé e Príncipe é considerado extremamente vulnerável com os impactos de mudança climática. Estes impactos são: secas, tempestades, enchentes relâmpagos e elevação do nível do mar (INDC, 2015).

Ponta Baleia é uma pequena comunidade rural localizada no Distrito de Caué, uma das áreas mais escassamente habitadas do país com uma população acima de 7.500 (INE, 2018). Os residentes desta região sobrevivem através da produção agrícola irrigada, criação de animais a solta (principalmente as de porcos e galinhas), pesca, produção de vinho de palmeira, pequenos comércios e troca de serviços. A comunidade enfrenta uma série de desafios ambientais e de desenvolvimento que são relacionados à energia, abastecimento de água, saneamento básico, segurança alimentar, educação, transporte e saúde pública. A grande maioria dos residentes vivem no estado do que pode ser considerado como “pobreza absoluta”. Em relação aos impactos climáticos e do meio-ambiente, residentes frequentemente têm queixas e se preocupam sobre os casos crescentes e intensos de enchentes, já que Ponta Baleia fica localizada numa das regiões mais vulneráveis do país, localizada nas encostas íngremes. Além disso, não existe um sistema de drenagem, o que significa que a água da chuva e inundações ficam presas no centro da região, aumentando os riscos de diarreia, malária e outras doenças transmitidas pela água. Também há relatos de deslizamentos de terra na área local.

O projeto de adaptação intitulado Reforço das capacidades das comunidades rurais ao efeito das mudanças climáticas em São Tomé e Príncipe nos distritos de Mé-Zóchi, Cantagalo, Caué, Lembá, Lobata e na Região Autónoma do Príncipe (*Enhancing capacities of rural communities to pursue climate resilient livelihood options in São Tomé and Príncipe districts of Caué, Mé-Zóchi, Príncipe, Lembá, Cantagalo e Lobata*) foi levantado em parceria entre o PNUD e o governo nacional, e teve como objetivo aumentar a resiliência dos meios de subsistência rurais

housing – and moreover was not a sustainable solution due to the exigencies of raising pigs in enclosed spaces. The vast majority of interviewees (residents and project staff alike) agreed that Ponta Baleians were united in this regard, despite the fact that confrontational stances towards development projects are relatively rare in STP. Faced with this community-level resistance, project management from UNDP and the Ministry of Agriculture sought mediation by the local authorities in Caué, which did not lead to a resolution and resulted in Ponta Baleia being bypassed by the project in its first phase.

## Conflict causes

The study identified a range of local and systemic factors that have led the community of Ponta Baleia to reject the solutions proposed by the project.

### Local factors

- **Isolation:** The history of being bypassed by outside investment has led to, in the words of the former local government leader, “an advanced state of precariousness” caused by “a different treatment” the community is thought to be receiving compared to its neighbors. The resulting deep poverty and infrastructural challenges prevent the residents of Ponta Baleia from meeting their basic needs.
- **Previous experience with development agents:** Ponta Baleians have had a number of what could be described as unproductive experiences with outside development agents. This includes delivering equipment that did not work properly, failure to include the entire community in project-related discussions, and promises made by development organizations and political candidates that were never honored.
- **Sense of resignation and abandonment:** The combination of the two factors outlined above has created a deep sense of resignation and abandonment among most residents. Community members do not believe that consultation meetings are worthwhile, because they do not consider their needs or requests on a par with those preferred by development managers.
- **Porto Alegre Community Group:** The Porto Alegre Community Group was started by *Leigos para o Desenvolvimento* – a Portuguese faith-based non-governmental organization (NGO) which places volunteers in Caué to work closely with the district's local communities. The Group meets on a bimonthly basis and includes representatives of around thirty local associations, organizations and groups. This inclusive Community Group has helped the residents of Ponta Baleia develop an ability to formulate their own interests vis-à-vis outside development agents and self-empowered them to oppose any activities that ignore those interests.
- **Cultural and historical factors:** Practitioners also mentioned what they perceived as a culturally-ingrained recalcitrance of the *Angolares* – one of STP's ethnic groups forming the majority of Ponta Baleia residents – to work with outsiders as a possible factor that facilitated local resistance to the project. Interviewees also mentioned that the historically low levels of community cohesion in STP at large make the country a difficult place to work for organizations that follow a collective approach to development. This, however, contradicts the community's near-unanimity in the dispute against UNDP.

aos impactos climáticos em um total de 30 comunidades locais nos seis distritos de São Tomé e Príncipe. Este objetivo teve como uma função de alcançar a capacidade das instituições nacionais no contexto da gestão de riscos climáticos, introduzir infraestruturas à prova de clima e práticas de subsistência que aumentam a resiliência, como também implementar estratégias de adaptação ao nível da comunidade.

## Visão geral do conflito

A disputa entre os moradores de Ponta Baleia e a equipe do projeto de adaptação entrou em erupção quando, após diagnósticos rápidos participativos (DRPs), o PNUD propôs construções de pocilgas para tratar dos riscos à saúde ambiental que são associados ao gado sem cerca que circulavam livremente nas aldeias. No entanto, os moradores indicaram que isso não sobrepunharia às prioridades atuais de desenvolvimento da comunidade – neste caso, especificamente, o decrépito estado das residências locais, e além do mais, criar porcos em seus espaços fechados não era uma solução sustentável devido às exigências do mesmo. Houve um acordo entre a grande maioria dos entrevistadores (moradores da região e funcionários do projeto) em entender que a comunidade de Ponta Baleia estava unida com resistência, já que confrontos com projetos de desenvolvimento são relativamente raros em São Tomé e Príncipe. Entretanto, diante dessa resistência ao nível da comunidade, o gerenciamento de projetos do PNUD e do Ministério da Agricultura buscaram mediações das autoridades locais em Caué, o que levou em nenhuma resolução, e resultou em Ponta Baleia sendo amplamente ignorada pelo projeto em sua primeira fase.

## Causas do conflito

O estudo identificou vários fatores locais e sistêmicos que levou a comunidade da Ponta Baleia rejeitar soluções propostas pelo projeto.

### Fatores locais

- **Isolamento:** O fato do histórico ter sido ignorado por investimentos externos levou nas palavras do ex-líder do governo local “um estado avançado de precariedade” causado por “um tratamento diferente” que a comunidade estava recebendo em comparação com os seus vizinhos. Resultante de pobreza profunda e os desafios da infraestrutura impediram que os moradores de Ponta Baleia tivessem suas necessidades básicas atendidas.
- **Experiências anteriores com os agentes do desenvolvimento:** Os moradores de Ponta Baleia têm tido experiências improdutivas com os agentes externos de desenvolvimento. A entrega de equipamentos que não funcionaram corretamente, a falha de incluir toda a comunidade nas discussões relacionadas ao projeto, e as promessas (des)feitas por organizações de desenvolvimento e candidatos políticos que nunca se materializaram são exemplos dos que os moradores de Ponta Baleia enfrentaram.
- **Senso de resignação e abandono:** A combinação dos fatores anteriormente mencionados criaram um senso de resignação e abandono profundo entre os residentes. Os membros da comunidade não acreditam que as reuniões da consulta valham a pena, porque as necessidades ou solicitações dos mesmos não são atendidas de acordo.
- **Grupo Comunitário de Porto Alegre:** O Grupo Comunitário de



### Systemic factors

- **International development aid structure:** The short-term nature of most development and adaptation projects precludes them from achieving long-lasting change. A closely related issue is the current design architecture of projects, which is considered overly rigid. One of the reasons UNDP and the government were unable to accommodate Ponta Baleia residents' request for assistance in renovating their houses was that support of this kind was not part of the project's official remit, despite being a clear priority for the local community. The current disbursement structure discourages creativity and adaptability in project design and implementation of the kind that was required in the case of Ponta Baleia.
- **Project design:** The setup of the adaptation project, itself – including its focus (on climate change impacts rather than the underlying causes of local vulnerability), its participation model (which resulted in a limited number of scarcely engaging consultation events), and institutional capacity (among state and development actors to carry out meaningful participation) – similarly limited the degree to which it could be seen as relevant for and responsive to the needs of Ponta Baleia residents.
- **STP's political context:** The disconnect between local needs and national priorities made evident by the adaptation project can also be explained by political and institutional factors at the national level. Local authorities (*Câmaras distritais*) were side-lined in design and implementation despite having closer ties to the beneficiaries and often having a more nuanced understanding of their needs and expectations. Moreover, with only \$4 million USD to distribute among national institutions and 30 local communities, the project was decidedly too ambitious, and therefore unable to address the local development challenges in a meaningful manner. Pressure to include 30 communities came from the government seeking to maximize the initiative's geographical reach, which interviewees interpreted as a sign of political expediency.

### Recommendations

The recommendations put forth by this study are a combination of suggestions by research participants and the research team. These pertain to:

- **Overhauling project participation models:** In the case of the adaptation project, the specific recommendations refer to the need to include all residents in consultation meetings regardless of whether they will directly benefit from the intervention, improving communication style with the recipients of aid, and ensuring their regular contact with the project.
- **Overhauling project design, implementation and monitoring approaches:** What added to the project's low level of legitimacy was the top-down manner in which such interventions are designed and implemented. Recommendations here include increased flexibility in terms of scope, opening projects to local understandings of climate change, adaptation and vulnerability, and an emphasis on the quality rather than the quantity of project activities.

Porto Alegre foi iniciado pela ONG de cunho religioso Leigos para o Desenvolvimento, que coloca voluntários em Caué para colaborar com as comunidades locais do distrito. O Grupo se reúne bimestralmente e inclui representantes à cerca de trinta (30) associações, organizações e grupos locais. O Grupo Comunitário, que é inclusivo, ajuda os moradores de Ponta Baleia a desenvolver a capacidade de formular seus próprios interesses em relação aos agentes externos de desenvolvimento, e criar uma capacidade para se oporem à as quaisquer atividades que ignorassem seus interesses.

- **Fatores históricos e culturais:** Os profissionais também mencionaram que consideraram o que é chamado de recalcitrância cultural dos Angolares, sendo um dos grupos étnicos de São Tomé e Príncipe que capacitaram a maioria dos moradores de Ponta Baleia, a terem práticas de trabalho com pessoas de fora, o que possivelmente facilitou a resistência local ao projeto. Os entrevistadores também mencionaram que os níveis historicamente baixos de coesão das comunidades no país tornam-se um local difícil para trabalhar para as organizações que seguem uma abordagem coletiva ao desenvolvimento. Isso, no entanto, contradiz a quase unanimidade da comunidade na disputa contra o PNUD.

### Fatores sistêmicos

- **Estrutura internacional de ajuda ao desenvolvimento:** A natureza de curto prazo da maioria dos projetos de desenvolvimento e adaptação impede de obter mudanças duradouras. A arquitetura de design atual dos projetos, por exemplo, é considerada excessivamente rígida. Além disso, uma das razões pelas quais o PNUD e o governo não foram capazes de atender ao pedido de assistência dos moradores de Ponta Baleia na reforma de suas casas foi que esse tipo de apoio não fazia parte da missão oficial do projeto, apesar de ser uma clara prioridade para a comunidade local. A atual estrutura de desembolso simplesmente desencoraja a criatividade e a adaptabilidade na concepção e implementação do projeto, o que era imposto no caso de Ponta Baleia.
- **Design do projeto:** A configuração do projeto em si – incluindo o seu foco (nos impactos da mudança climática ao invés de focar nas causas da vulnerabilidade local), o modelo de participação (o que resultou em números limitados e baixa qualidade nos eventos de consulta), e a capacidade institucional (entre pessoas do estado e governantes de desenvolvimento para realizar uma participação significativa) – limitou de maneira semelhante o grau em que o projeto poderia ser visto como relevante e reativo para as necessidades dos moradores de Ponta Baleia.
- **Contexto político de STP:** A desunião entre as necessidades locais e as prioridades nacionais evidenciadas pelo projeto de adaptação também pode ser explicada pelos fatores políticos e institucionais a nível nacional. O poder das Câmaras Distritais foi limitado em conceituar e implementar o projeto, apesar de terem tido laços mais estreitos com os beneficiários, e muitas vezes, com uma compreensão mais sutil de suas necessidades e expectativas. Além disso, com apenas US\$ 4 milhões para distribuir entre instituições

▼

- **Development and adaptation aid reform:** The research team recommend starting conversations and efforts to reform the current international development aid and programming architecture. Starting points in this context include the potential of social protection programs to promote adaptation (through adaptive social protection, ASP) and decentralization of aid. The latter will require increased flexibility in how funds are spent locally as well as affording more decision-making powers (and potentially responsibilities) to local governments and local communities, which should be included in project design, implementation and monitoring in capacities that go beyond what has been historically deemed sufficient by the development sector.

- **Future research directions:** Future critical research is recommended on the localized dynamics of both planned and autonomous adaptation. First, there is an urgent need for studies capable of exposing and investigating the various kinds of inequalities between communities and development organizations as well as within communities themselves that govern how people's lives and livelihoods are affected by rapidly accelerating climatic changes. In general, more focused research is needed on the relationship between adaptation, development and climate justice. Second, the traditionally techno-managerial focus of adaptation research and practice should be superseded by more people-oriented approaches which foreground the lived experiences of climate change. Participatory action research on adaptation, in particular, can generate the necessary evidence to build this essential awareness and ultimately help decolonize our knowledge on climate change in low and middle-income countries.

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nacionais e 30 comunidades locais, o projeto era decididamente ambicioso, e portanto, incapaz de enfrentar os desafios do desenvolvimento local de maneira significativa. A pressão para incluir 30 comunidades veio do governo, buscando aumentar o alcance geográfico da iniciativa, o que fez os entrevistados verem isso como um sinal de conveniência política.

## Recomendações

As recomendações apresentadas neste estudo são uma combinação de sugestões dos participantes da pesquisa, assim como da equipe de pesquisa. Estas são

- **Revisão geral dos modelos de participação no projeto:** No caso do projeto de adaptação, as recomendações específicas se referem à necessidade de inclusão; da participação de todos os moradores nas reuniões de consulta, independente se os mesmos diretamente se beneficiarem da intervenção, visando melhorar o estilo de comunicação com os beneficiários, e garantindo contato regular com o projeto.
- **Revisão das abordagens de design, implementação e monitoramento de projetos:** O que acrescentou ao baixo nível de legitimidade do projeto foi a maneira descendente em que essas intervenções foram projetadas e implementadas. As recomendações neste caso incluem propôr maior flexibilidade em termos de escopo, criar uma abertura de projetos para entendimentos locais de mudança climática, adaptação e vulnerabilidade, e focar na qualidade, e não na quantidade de atividades do projeto
- **Reforma da ajuda ao desenvolvimento e à adaptação:** A equipe de pesquisa recomenda iniciar discussões e esforços para reformar a atual arquitetura internacional de ajuda e programação de desenvolvimento. Os pontos de partida neste contexto incluem sobressair a potência dos programas de proteção social para promover a adaptação (chamada "proteção social adaptativa") e a descentralização da ajuda. Este último exigirá maior flexibilidade na forma como os fundos são gastos localmente e proporcionará mais poderes de tomada de decisão (e responsabilidades) aos governos locais e comunidades locais, que devem ser incluídos na concepção, implementação e monitoramento dos projetos em capacidades que vão além do que foi historicamente considerado suficiente pelo setor de desenvolvimento.
- **Direcionamento para futuras pesquisas:** É recomendado que hajam futuras pesquisas que visam ter uma visão crítica localizada nas dinâmicas de ambas adaptação tanto planejada quanto a autônoma. Primeiro, há uma necessidade emergente e urgente dos estudos capazes de expôr e investigar diversos tipos de desigualdades entre comunidades e organizações de desenvolvimento, assim como dentro das comunidades que governam vidas das pessoas vulneráveis, e principalmente das áreas que são rapidamente e aceleradamente afetadas por mudanças climáticas. Em geral, é preciso que hajam pesquisas focadas no relacionamento entre adaptação, desenvolvimento e justiça climática. Segundo, o foco da prática e da pesquisa sobre a adaptação à tradição tecno-gerencial deve ser substituído por abordagens que orientam mais as pessoas que têm experiências vividas das mudanças climáticas. A pesquisa ativa-participativa, no entanto, pode gerar evidências necessárias para construir uma base essencial de conscientização neste contexto e ajudar a descolonizar os nossos conhecimentos sobre as mudanças climáticas.

# 1. Introduction: Adaptation resisted

There is a widely recognized need for effective adaptation strategies in low and middle-income countries (LMICs) in general, and in natural-resource-dependent communities in particular (Adger et al., 2007). Meanwhile, adaptation funding is to receive an unprecedented boost of multiple billions USD via the Green Climate Fund (GCF, n.d.). However, despite the urgent need to enhance local levels of preparedness to climate impacts and the growing financial resources to do so, research has shown that promoting adaptive capacity is far from straightforward. This is because adaptation is an intrinsically political process riddled with power inequalities at different levels of decision-making (Eriksen et al., 2015; Mikulewicz, 2018; Nightingale, 2015), and can frequently lead to local tensions and conflicts. This is one of the key reasons why despite the intensifying efforts to promote adaptation to climate change across LMICs (Ford et al., 2015; Scoville-Simonds, 2016), interventions have often failed to decrease local vulnerabilities to climate impacts (Taylor, 2014). Not only that, some have also started to encounter various forms of local opposition, expressed by general apathy, disapproval, and passive or even active resistance from the recipients of adaptation aid. And while international development has seen multiple instances of local resistance throughout history (Ferguson, 1994; Nilsen, 2016; Scott, 1985), evidence of resistance to adaptation and its implications for local lives and livelihoods has been largely anecdotal.

Yet, addressing localized resistance of this kind is of crucial importance for the long-term viability of local livelihoods, especially given the projected increase in the number and intensity of extreme weather events in tropical and sub-tropical regions (Niang et al., 2014). The existence of high levels of vulnerability in natural-resource-dependent communities alone constitutes a climate injustice, whereby those who did not contribute in any meaningful manner to global greenhouse gas emissions are highly exposed to the impacts of climate change caused by these emissions (Gardiner, 2011; Jafry et al., 2019; Thorp, 2014). Moreover, and of particular importance for this topic, they are also frequently unable to benefit from the adaptation assistance that is offered.

The guiding mission of this study is to contribute to finding ways to address this issue. This report summarizes the findings and recommendations of the research project titled *Investigating local resistance to climate change adaptation: Climate injustice in São Tomé and Príncipe* funded by The Carnegie Trust for the Universities of Scotland (RIG007851). The study critically analyzed the resistance of the residents of Ponta Baleia – a small community in São Tomé and Príncipe (STP) – to an adaptation project led by UNDP and the national government. Our findings unveil the causes, dynamics and consequences of the project's failure to increase local adaptive capacity and allow us to propose recommendations for preventing similar conflicts around adaptation and development in the future.

After listing the research questions below, the remaining parts of this report will provide a short theoretical overview of resistance in international development and the relationship between adaptation and climate justice. This will be followed by a short methodology which will explain the adopted research methods and provide relevant background on STP, the community of Ponta Baleia and the adaptation project. In the most substantive part of the report, we trace the history of the local conflict and map the various local and systemic factors that our analysis suggests have precipitated it. We conclude by providing recommendations on development and adaptation aid reform, project design and implementation, adaptation participation models, and future research directions.

## Research questions

This report presents the findings based on the following four research questions:

1. What are the underlying causes, the guiding dynamics, and the potential short- and long-term effects of resistance to adaptation at the local level, particularly in relation to the marginalized residents of Ponta Baleia?
2. To what degree has the resistance by local residents to the currently promoted form of adaptation been successful?
3. How can the visibility, political equality and subjectivity of local people be foregrounded when planning and implementing external adaptation interventions?
4. How can adaptation to climate change as a goal of global and national policy be reformed or transformed in order to better address the inherent injustice of climate change impacts?



## 2. Key concepts: Resistance, development, adaptation and climate justice

### Local resistance to development

In his seminal book on everyday forms of peasant resistance in rural Malaysia, James Scott (Scott, 1985, p. 289) defines resistance as:

*any act(s) by member(s) of a subordinate class that is or are intended either to mitigate or deny claims (for example, rents, taxes, prestige) made on that class by superordinate classes (for example, landlords, large farmers, the state) or to advance its own claims (for example, work, land, charity, respect) vis-à-vis those superordinate classes (emphasis in original).*

With this definition, Scott (1985) suggests that resistance can be both individual and collective, ideological as well as material, and that it ultimately does not matter whether it is successful or not. He also argues that historical analysis tends to focus on grand events such as rebellions and revolutions, often missing the everyday forms of resistance that routinely mediate social relations at very local levels.

While in his book Scott focused on internal class struggle at the village level, resistance to the process of promoting development in LMICs – of which adaptation has become an integral part – is not a new phenomenon. Ever since European powers colonized lands beyond the Old World, various groups and peoples resisted, whether it was against violent colonial force (Rodney, 2012), the seemingly benign ‘civilizing’ or modernizing mission of the West (Escobar, 1995, 2000; Kapoor, 2008), neoliberalization (Moosa & Moosa, 2019), or the activities of transnational corporations penetrating cities and rural places in developing countries (Nilsen, 2011). However, it should be noted that most frequently this resistance is not aimed at the idea of development itself, as few people do not wish for a higher quality of life, but rather against the way in which it is understood by governments and their national and international partners. As Nilsen (2016) notes, resistance – more than a simple assertion of otherness – “is a practice of meaning- and claims-making that hinges on oppositional appropriations of dominant symbols and idioms” (p. 273). As such, he argues that social movements that oppose development seek to invert the dominant (though by no means fixed) meaning of development in line with their own imaginaries of tomorrow (Nilsen, 2016).

More recently, this resistance has come in response to the techno-managerial or technocratic bent of development and its domination by experts (e.g. economists, econometrists, development consultants, planners, engineers). One of the consequences of this has been development’s inability to respond to local needs and expectations, with projects, programs and policies reflecting the priorities of development agents rather than those set by local recipients of aid. In this context, scholars and activists have long critiqued the ineffective participation paradigm guiding development interventions (Boezeman et al., 2014; Cooke & Kothari, 2001; Hickey & Mohan, 2004). Participation, as an ideal, is certainly worth pursuing, but its practical manifestations have oftentimes turned out to be tokenistic and sometimes outright dismissive or disrespectful towards local people. It is also (but not exclusively) against this backdrop that development agents have met with localized resistance to their activities.

Recent history has delivered multiple examples of more or less successful acts of collective resistance to development as understood by international and state actors. Prominent examples include the Narmada Dam protests in India (Nilsen, 2011), the Cochabamba Water War in Bolivia (Schiffler, 2015), the protests by La Vía Campesina in Latin America (Martínez-Torres & Rosset, 2010), civic struggle against water meters in South Africa (Dugard, 2011), labor protests in Egypt and Arabian Peninsula (Chalcraft, 2011), indigenous opposition to wind farm development in Mexico (Dunlap, 2018) or ‘IMF riots’ across the LMICs (Moosa & Moosa, 2019). These instances of collective resistance frequently come as a result of concerted activities by more or less homogeneous social movements, explaining the high level of attention they receive from the press, scholars and decision-makers alike. However, resistance can come in forms less visible and terms less captivating than ‘Water War.’ As suggested by Scott (1985), every-day struggles in urban and rural locales are seldom underpinned by social movements and unfold continuously often without even being noticed, let alone addressed.



This kind of more localized and decidedly less visible instances of resistance can come in various forms. In her book *Growing Up Global*, Cindi Katz (2004) distinguishes between three forms of responses to outside development assistance: *resilience*, *reworking* and *resistance*.<sup>1</sup> The first term pertains to finding “yet other ways to get by each day” (Katz, 2004, p. 244), often in response to revanchist state and non-state processes that make local livelihoods more fragile, such as neoliberalization and the associated dismantlement of social support programs or agricultural extension services. Reworking, whereby people recognize their problematic conditions and act to redistribute resources in their favor, is a step up from resilience but seldom undermines the foundations of a given system (Katz, 2004). Resistance, on the other hand, requires an “oppositional consciousness” (Katz, 2004, p. 251), which seeks to redress various conditions of exploitation and oppression. As an example, Katz invokes the practice of allowing farm animals to graze in the cotton fields belonging to a development project (a practice that was officially banned) adopted by farmers in Howa, Sudan, or the same farmers petitioning the Sudanese Ministry of Agriculture to expand the selection of crops permitted to be grown on project lands. Resistance here goes beyond subversion to include attempts to transform what recipients of aid consider oppressive or exploitative social structures. These attempts, in Katz’s view, stem from the “mimetic faculty” – the capacity to “provoke an alternative, oppositional, and even revolutionary imagination that can see in the same, something different” (Katz, 2004, p. 257). Without this critical awareness of what could be but is not, it is more appropriate to speak of resilience or reworking practices. The evidence presented below suggests that the people of Ponta Baleia possess the mimetic faculty and oppositional consciousness theorized by Katz, as they actively sought to remedy the fundamental inequality between them and project managers in the context of project design and implementation.

### Adaptation and climate Justice

One of the most recent development paradigms has been centered squarely on climate change, and particularly on how countries described as particularly vulnerable could be assisted in preparing for its impacts. Adaptation has therefore become entangled in the complex landscape of international development. In this context, the aforementioned techno-managerialism manifests itself in the overly focus on the ‘natural’ causes of climate issues at the cost of social vulnerability (Mikulewicz, 2018; Ribot, 2010). In other words, the dominant approach seeks to climate-proof lives and livelihoods of already vulnerable populations, leaving the underlying determinants of their vulnerability largely unaddressed. This, next to low effectiveness, can lead to significant rifts in the understandings of what is needed to address local climate-related challenges between state ideologies and local knowledge (Nilsen, 2016).

In response to these tensions, many scholars have observed that adaptation is a political and often politicized process, which rather than benefiting everyone, often leads to the emergence of winners and losers (Adger et al., 2005). These observers do not consider adaptation as beneficial ‘by default.’ In fact, if misunderstood and implemented incorrectly, it can result in maladaptation by, for instance, inadvertently exacerbating existing inequalities and vulnerabilities (Juhola et al., 2016; Mikulewicz, 2020). To avoid this, it is therefore necessary to pay close attention to the existing power dynamics both between beneficiaries and development agents, and among the beneficiaries themselves, including at the community level (Mikulewicz, 2018). In other words, issues of recognition, procedural and distributive justice should become the center of attention for any actor wishing to study or facilitate adaptation to climate change locally. While this perspective is frequently eschewed by many development agents, particularly those working closely with national governments, failure to recognize the political nature of adaptation is likely to result in ineffective interventions lacking local legitimacy and sustainability.

This observation is of crucial importance as climate change impacts continue to increase in intensity and frequency in LMICs (IPCC, 2018). However, it is precisely this widely recognized urgency of adaptation and mitigation that is likely to prioritize solutions which – though more readily deployable – can often be undemocratic and seem irrelevant to those who need them. Therefore, while this urgency to act is certainly important, it should be accompanied by a

<sup>1</sup> However, it should be noted that the three categories charted by Katz are not discrete or exhaustive, as many oppositional acts could be considered hybridized.

diligent appreciation of how much time and effort it takes to co-produce locally relevant and feasible adaptation interventions. Otherwise, as the case of Ponta Baleia analyzed here demonstrates, these are likely to be contested and ultimately fail to decrease vulnerability. And while resistance to outside development or adaptation assistance on the part of local people may seem illogical or even self-sabotaging, such an interpretation fails to appreciate the complexity of the local adaptive process and obscures the unevenness of the social relations governing it. To remedy misinterpretations of this kind, an approach rooted in climate justice (Anderson, 2013; Jafry et al., 2019) can help put people back in the center of adaptation discussions and investigate the various kinds of inequalities, tensions, conflicts and sometimes oppressions that determine local levels of adaptive capacity and adaptation choices.

Climate justice is a concept of increasing importance in both climate studies and adaptation praxis. As mentioned above, insights from critical adaptation scholarship point to the highly uneven nature of the adaptive process which must be taken into consideration for any planned or autonomous adaptation strategy to be successful in the long term (Mikulewicz, 2020). Climate justice considers the ethical dimensions of climate change, and advocates for an explicit focus on the needs and interests of those who are least able to address the challenges to their lives and livelihoods posed by climate impacts (Bond, 2010; Jafry et al., 2019; Thorp, 2014). More often than not, these groups and individuals have done very little to cause climate change in the first place, further compounding this injustice. Relatedly, a climate justice approach to development also stresses the need for increasing the local agency of aid recipients. Among other implications, this entails actively including them in all stages of planning, implementation and monitoring beyond what has been seen as acceptable by the development sector.

Ethical dimensions aside, however, it has been observed that the focus on addressing inequality in development – and thus in adaptation – leads to more successful outcomes at the local level and to more resilient societies, in general (Doyle & Stiglitz, 2014; OECD, 2015; UNDP, 2013). Therefore, a climate justice focus in development work is not only the ‘right’ thing to do – it can also facilitate successful outcomes of local adaptation interventions. Adaptation solutions, as critical scholars and practitioners suggest, must be co-produced rather than imposed in a top-down manner by adaptation and development managers or public agencies. As such, adaptation must become democratized by moving away from the disempowering techno-managerialism that has guided it for the last two decades (Mikulewicz, 2018).

Without a doubt, the resistance encountered by the adaptation project in Ponta Baleia goes against the principles of climate justice. Equally, it constitutes a missed opportunity for decreasing residents' vulnerabilities and enhancing their levels of agency over their own adaptations. The following sections shed more light on the reasons why the people of Ponta Baleia rejected the assistance of the adaptation project, covering the study's methodology, and background, and the causes and dynamics of this resistance, before finally turning to recommendations for the development sector.

### 3. Methodology and background

The study adopted a qualitative approach to answering the research questions listed in the Introduction. It involved fieldwork in STP conducted by the lead author over a period of 11 days (23 February to 5 March 2019), which included three site visits to Ponta Baleia. A total of 17 interviews were conducted: nine with Ponta Baleia residents (five women and four men), three with UNDP staff members, three with government officials and two with representatives of NGOs present in the country. Two gender-disaggregated focus groups with Ponta Baleia residents (with 2 men and 3 women, respectively) were also conducted. This was supplemented by data obtained as part of the lead author's doctoral fieldwork in STP in early 2016, which involved 42 interviews with practitioners and members of another local community in the northern district of Lobata participating in the same adaptation project.

All primary data was complemented by secondary data, including both internal and publicly available documents on the village of Ponta Baleia, the local climate, the adaptation project and development governance in the country.



Figure 1: Forest hills and mountains in Caué - the district where Ponta Baleia is located. Source: Lead author's personal archive.

#### Interviews and focus groups

To facilitate entry into the village, the lead author was introduced to the community leader by a volunteer from *Leigos para o Desenvolvimento*, a locally active Portuguese NGO that has a working relationship with the residents. The leader then selected 12 community members representing different age groups and professions to participate in the interviews and focus groups, which took place in the community shed. All interviews and focus groups were translated on site from Angolar Creole to English by a hired interpreter. Questions pertained to life in Ponta Baleia, participants' background, their experience with development interventions (and the UNDP adaptation project, in particular), as well as their suggested recommendations for the future. As a token of appreciation for the residents' time and insights, and having consulted the leader of Ponta Baleia, the research team provided a supply of school materials for all pupils in the village.

The interviews with UNDP staff members and government officials were held at the UNDP Country office in the capital (4), the interviewee's workplace (1) or home (1), while those with





Figure 2: The village *quintal* (center) with local houses and free-roaming farm animals. Source: Lead author's personal archive.

NGO representatives took place in the garden of the hotel where the lead author was staying (1) and outdoors in the town of Porto Alegre (1). All were conducted in English or Portuguese (see Table 1), with questions on local development and adaptation challenges, development projects' relations with beneficiaries (including the dispute in Ponta Baleia), and recommendations for the future.

All interviews and focus groups were audio-recorded and subsequently translated and transcribed directly into English by a third-party interpreter based in the United Kingdom, and coded by the research team. Analysis was conducted based on the research questions and followed a thematic analysis approach (Guest et al., 2012).

Code	Participant background	Method	Language	Duration (mins.)
UNDP1	UNDP employee	Interview	Portuguese	30
UNDP2	UNDP employee	Interview	English	34
UNDP3	UNDP employee	Interview	English	33
NGO1	NGO employee	Interview	English	82
NGO2	NGO employee	Interview	English	21
GOV1	Government official	Interview	Portuguese	85
GOV2	Government official	Interview	Portuguese	37
GOV3	Government official	Interview	Portuguese	35
F1	Ponta Baleia resident (woman)	Interview	Portuguese	11
F2	Ponta Baleia resident (woman)	Interview	Portuguese	22
F3	Ponta Baleia resident (woman)	Interview	Portuguese	24
F4	Ponta Baleia resident (woman)	Interview	Portuguese	41
M1	Ponta Baleia resident (man)	Interview	Portuguese	25
M2	Ponta Baleia resident (man)	Interview	Portuguese	16
M3	Ponta Baleia resident (man)	Interview	Portuguese	53
FG1	Focus group with 2 men in Ponta Baleia	Focus group	Portuguese	27
FG2	Focus group with 3 women in Ponta Baleia	Focus group	Portuguese	38

Table 1. Interview and focus group details.



National context

STP is a small island nation of over 210,000 people located in the Gulf of Guinea (see Figure 8), with the capital city of São Tomé being home to over a third of the national population (see Figure 3) (INE, 2018). After an almost 500-year-long history of subjugation to Portuguese colonial rule, STP gained independence in 1975 (Seibert, 2006). Its economy is highly reliant on primary exports, and the country currently deals with a range of development challenges related to health, education, and high levels of poverty (UNDP, 2014). Classified as a Least Developed Country (LDCs) and a Small Island Developing State (SIDS) by the United Nations (UN), STP is considered highly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. These include droughts, storm surges, flash floods, and sea-level rise (INDC, 2015), which are unevenly distributed on account of a number of microclimates on the island.



Figure 3: São Tomé - STP's capital city. Source: Lead author's personal archive.



Figure 4: Steep volcanic coastline in the Caué District. Source: Lead author's personal archive.

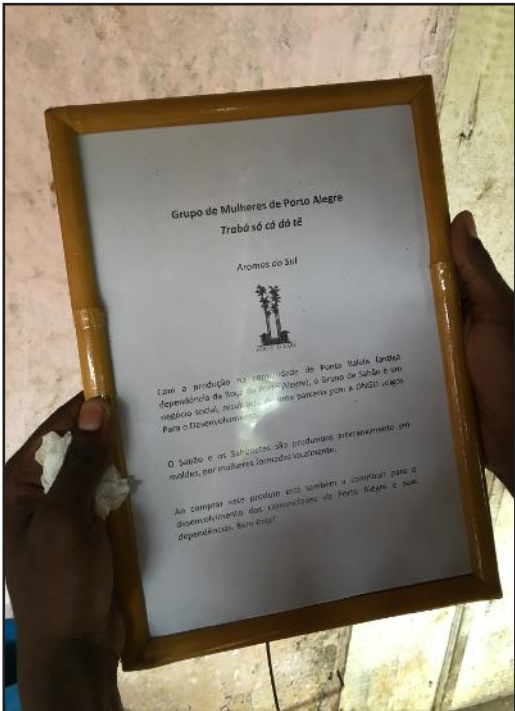


Figure 5: The soap cooperative information sheet. Source: Lead author's personal archive.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> The certificate reads: "Porto Alegre Women's Group *Trabá só cá dá tê* [Work is what brings money]. Scents of the South. With production in the community of Ponta Baleia (a former Porto Alegre Plantation satellite), the Soap Group is a social business born out of a partnership with the NGO Leigos para o Desenvolvimento. The soap and soap bars are produced artisanally in molds by women organizing locally. By buying this product, you are also contributing to the development of Porto Alegre and its satellite villages. Thank you!"

### The village of Ponta Baleia

Ponta Baleia is a small rural community located in Caué, the most sparsely inhabited and least accessible district of the country with a population of over 7,500 (INE, 2018). Caué's economy relies largely on small-scale agriculture and fishing, which became the dominant sources of income after the collapse of the plantation system in late 20th century. Over the last few decades, this has been accompanied by a rural exodus to the capital by a large number of local residents. While the 2012 census data suggests a local population of just 43 (INE, 2015), this figure is grossly underestimated, with one community member indicating during their interview that there were as many as 200 residents in Ponta Baleia. Almost half of the local population comprises under-15-year-olds (INE, 2015). The village is located at an approximate elevation of 200 feet on a steep volcano coastline (see Figure 4), and borders *Rua Nacional 2* (National Road 2, RN2), one of the country's main roads which runs along the east coast of the island from the capital to the town of Porto Alegre at the southern tip of São Tomé island (see Figures 6 and 7). However, the road bypasses the main part of the village, with the poor state of the unpaved path to the community proper precluding access by most vehicles. Due to the small size of the village, Ponta Baleians maintain strong social and economic ties to the much larger neighboring localities of Porto Alegre (4 km), Vila Malanza (2 km) and Ilhéu das Rolas, the latter a small island south of the village (see Figure 8).



Figure 6: A paved section of Rua Nacional 2.  
Source: Lead author's personal archive.



Figure 7: An unpaved section of Rua Nacional 2 in the Caué District. Source: Lead author's personal archive.

In terms of local livelihoods, residents rely on rain-fed agriculture (popular crops include manioc and matabala, a starchy tuber), fishing, palm wine production, animal husbandry (mostly free-roaming pigs and chickens), small trade (as in the case of the *palayés* – fish traders who are almost always women), and services (office work or agricultural labor for Agripalma, a French corporation that owns a large palm oil plantation in Caué – see: Figure 9). There are three main local associations in the community: *Bulaué Unidade de Ponta Baleia* (a folk dance group offering performances in a Portuguese hotel on Ilhéu das Rolas), a soap-producing group (see Figure 5) and a solar freezer group, the latter two of which are formed exclusively by women.





Figure 8: A map of STP, with the Caué District highlighted in red and Ponta Baleia clearly marked. Credits: Cartographic Unit at the School of Environment, Education and Development, University of Manchester, and Jon Cairns.





Figure 9: Cão Grande - STP's most iconic natural landmark, which is located in the Caué District. Foreground: *Agripalma* palm oil plantation. View from Rua Nacional 2. Source: Lead author's personal archive.



Figure 10: Buildings in Ponta Baleia. Source: Lead author's personal archive.

The community faces a range of development and environmental challenges related to housing, energy, water provision, sanitation, food security, education, transport, and public health. Many residents complain about the state of their houses which have not been renovated since colonial times when Ponta Baleia was a satellite village for *Rocha Porto Alegre* (the Porto Alegre Plantation) (see Figures 2, 10, 13 and 14). There is no access to electricity (the closest socket is in Vila Malanza two kilometers away), and the community taps located in the center of the village connect directly to the river, bringing untreated water to the community. There are no educational facilities – young residents need to travel to Vila Malanza where the nearest school facilities are located. There is no waste collection service, and the poor road into the village complicates access to health and emergency services (see Figure 11). Securing enough food for the family, while not mentioned by most interviewees, is also a challenge for some. The vast majority of residents live in what could be described as deep poverty.



Figure 11: The dirt road leading from Rua Nacional 2 to the village center (about 100 meters). Source: Lead author's personal archive.



With regards to local environmental and climate impacts, residents frequently complain about the increasing intensity of flooding events, to which Ponta Baleia is particularly vulnerable due to its geographic location on a steep slope. Similarly, there is no drainage system, meaning that flood- and rainwater become trapped in the village center, increasing the risk of diarrhea, malaria and other waterborne diseases. There have also been reports of landslides in the local area.

The adaptation project

The adaptation project titled *Enhancing capacities of rural communities to pursue climate resilient livelihood options in São Tomé and Príncipe districts of Caué, Mé-Zóchi, Príncipe, Lembá, Cantagalo, and Lobata (CMPLCL)* was one of the STP government’s responses to the adaptation needs identified in the country’s National Adaptation Program of Action (NAPA, 2006), and addressed NAPA Priorities 6 (Reinforcement and diversification of agricultural production), 8 (Sustainable management of forest resources) and 10 (Construction of infrastructure for protection of vulnerable communities) (UNDP, 2014). The initiative aimed to enhance the resilience of rural livelihoods to climate impacts in a total of 30 local communities in six districts of STP (five per district), and included three core components, each with an intended outcome (see Figure 12). These included increasing the capacity of national institutions in the context of climate risk management, introducing climate-proof infrastructure and resilience-enhancing livelihood practices, and implementing various adaptation strategies at the community level. Every outcome was then divided into between two and six outputs to be achieved by a selection of 56 specific activities (see: UNDP, 2014). It was, in essence, an agricultural development intervention. The formal project period was from 2014 to 2017 (UNDP, 2014), although at the time of fieldwork it had a significant delay of well over a year.

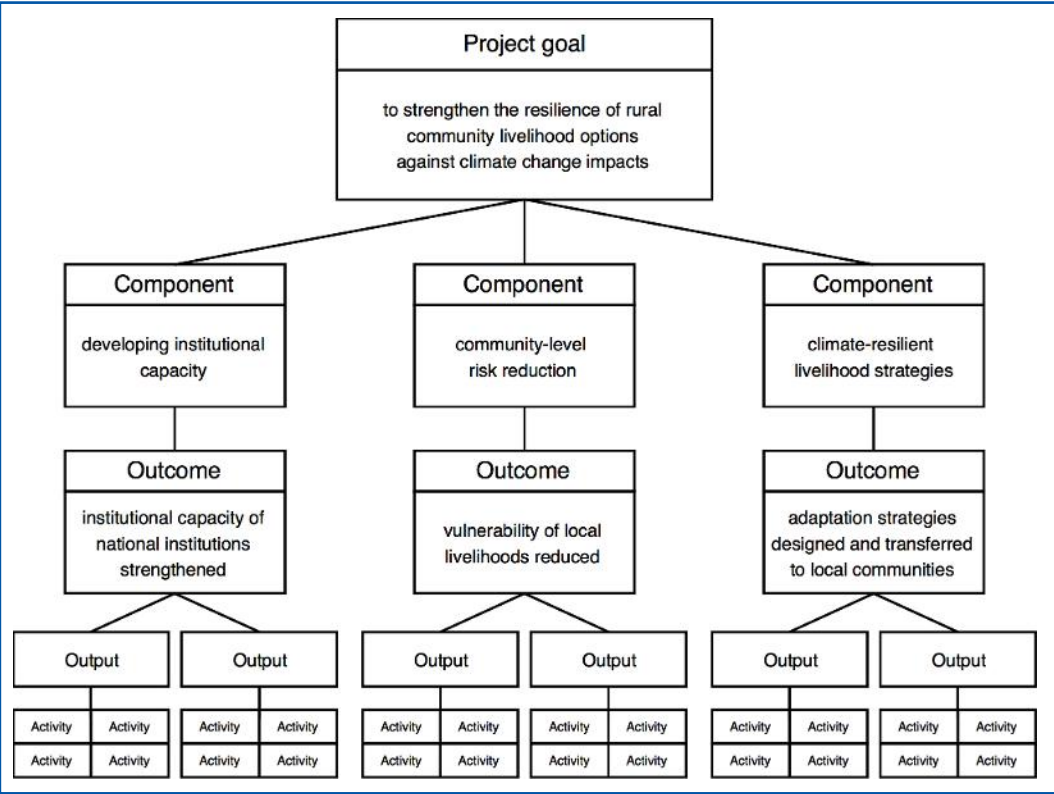


Figure 12: A simplified diagram of the UNDP adaption project showing its components, outcomes, outputs, and activities. Note: Outputs and activities are shown for reference only, as the diagram does not reflect their actual number. Source: UNDP (2014).

## 4. Resistance dynamics: What happened?

The local activities of the adaptation project started when UNDP and Ministry of Agriculture staff conducted a rapid participatory appraisal (*diagnóstico rápido participativo*, or DRP) in Ponta Baleia on 18 September 2015. The aim of this visit was to explain the initiative's major objectives and confirm the priorities identified by the community during the project formulation stage and included in the project document ('prodoc') by the international consultant from Portugal. The priorities collected as part of the DRP were subsequently divided by project staff into 'problems affecting the community' and 'problems related to climate change'. Table 2 lists the priorities in both categories. Further consultation events aimed at awareness raising were held in October and November 2015, during which the project team identified flooding and landslides as the main environmental issues affecting Ponta Baleia. In 2016, a topographical survey was conducted, with the goal of designing a drainage system in the village. At the same time, residents were informed of the possibility of constructing pigsties (*pocilgas*) to enclose free-roaming pigs which, next to poor drainage, were considered by the team to be a major public health risk to local residents.

Social problems affecting the community	Problems related to climate change in the community
Poor state of the access road	Lack of an irrigation system
Lack of transport options in case of emergencies or other needs	Soil erosion
Untreated water	Lack of rural credit
Insufficient land for community expansion	Floods affecting local residences
Highly degraded houses and infrastructure	Difficulties with agricultural product commercialization
Poor environmental health	Coastal erosion affecting the protection barrier
Lack of school transport	Pests and diseases
Lack of drainage channels	Tree cutting and shrinking forest area
Lack of electricity	Unfenced livestock

Table 2. A list of community issues collected as part of the rapid participatory appraisal conducted in Ponta Baleia by the project team, divided into 'social' and 'climate change' problems. Adapted from MADR (2015) and translated from Portuguese by the lead author.

However, once presented with this solution, community members indicated that it did not overlap with the community's development priorities – in this case the decrepit state of houses in the village. Thus, the residents requested that the project change its scope to address this issue and presented staff with an "ultimatum," as described by the then-head of the local government. If the project did not address the housing issue, the community would refuse to participate in it altogether. The vast majority of interviewees (residents and project staff alike) agreed that Ponta Baleians were unanimous, despite the fact that confrontational stances towards development projects are relatively rare in STP. The community was represented in this conflict by its long-time leader who enjoyed widespread local support. When prompted about the level of unity against the project at the community level, one of the residents responded:

*P1: Yes, [we are] united. If there's a problem, men, women – everyone speaks with one another. Sometimes, when a project comes, it will be disorganized and everyone does what they want. But we're still here, men and women, we are still united.*

*I: Do you agree with that?*

*P2: We agree, yes. Because we are really united. But when a project comes, the project comes with names of the persons. (FG1)*

However, it should be noted that at least one interviewee expressed regret that the pigsties were never constructed, as they would have prevented free-roaming animals from destroying crops in local fields. This points to at least some degree of internal disagreement which however was successfully masked by the projection of unity on the part of the village leadership.



Figure 13: A typical porch in Ponta Baleia. Source: Lead author's personal archive.



Figure 14: Buildings in Ponta Baleia: outside kitchens (foreground) and a *senzala* - former plantation workers' quarters (background). The carts and the freezer are located in one of the *senzala* rooms. Source: Lead author's personal archive.



Figure 15: Carts that the project delivered to Ponta Baleia alongside the photovoltaic panel and the freezer. Source: Lead author's personal archive.



Faced with this community-level resistance, project management from UNDP and the Ministry of Agriculture sought mediation with the local authorities in Caué. In early 2016, a meeting was held between project managers and local government representatives to discuss the situation and seek a resolution. Notably, however, no Ponta Baleia representatives were invited to the meeting. Ultimately, due to the lack of funds, the local government was unable to earmark any resources for housing repairs or reconstruction, despite recognizing the gravity of the issue in Ponta Baleia. Project staff organized additional meetings with the community involving senior UNDP officials in the country, which however did not lead to a mutually satisfactory solution. As a result, the project effectively omitted the village during its first implementation stage (ca. 2016-17), instead focusing on the other 29 participating communities across the country.

Reportedly, the project did not resume activities in Ponta Baleia until late 2018/early 2019, when the staff partnered with a local agricultural extension officer based in Porto Alegre to liaise with the community on alternative solutions. As a result of these facilitated consultations, it was decided that the project would procure a freezer powered by a photovoltaic panel along with a couple of delivery carts for the *palayés* (see Figures 15, 16 and 17). This was done following feedback that the fish the traders obtain from local fishermen notoriously spoil before getting sold (especially in distant locations), undercutting profits. To facilitate the management of the freezer, the adaptation project created an association of local women with exclusive access to the equipment. However, as will be outlined below, at the time of fieldwork the system was not operational and it was not clear to the residents when or if the issue would be resolved. Nevertheless, association members indicated the freezer was a beneficial investment for their livelihoods and looked forward to using it.



Figure 16: The freezer delivered by the adaptation project, which is powered by a photovoltaic panel installed on the roof (not pictured). Source: Lead author's personal archive.



Figure 17: Solar charge controller connecting the freezer with the photovoltaic panel. Source: Lead author's personal archive.



## 5. Causes of resistance: Why did it happen?

A former local government leader explained the events in Ponta Baleia as follows:

*Situations of lack of, let's say, attention to their priorities, create a distance between the electorate and the elected. And when this distance begins to reach critical proportions, that causes a rupture, and when that happens, this rupture manifests itself in the most diverse ways, and this refusal of Ponta Baleia is one of the ways in which this discontent is manifested. (GOV1)*

However, in many respects, the local development challenges faced by the residents of Ponta Baleia are emblematic of a number of other districts and communities in STP, including those participating in the adaptation project. Yet, Ponta Baleia was the only locality that actively refused to take part in it. The collected data points out to a number of interlinked institutional, political, financial, cultural and geographical factors, both systemic and local in nature, that have arguably pushed the community to oppose the adaptation solutions offered by UNDP and the national government.

### Local factors

The local factors that have led to local resistance to the adaptation project pertain to the community's relative isolation, its previous experience with outside agents, which both have led to a deep sense of resignation and abandonment among the residents, and the impact of a regional community discussion group. A few interviewees also pointed to the local culture as a possible factor.

### Isolation

As mentioned above, Ponta Baleia merely borders the main road leading from the capital to the town of Porto Alegre, with the village center located about 100 meters from the thoroughfare. The interviewed development practitioners and community residents spoke in this context of the disproportionate isolation of the village relative to the neighboring localities, particularly Vila Malanza and Porto Alegre which both have much more immediate access to the road:

*I know that this community feels very isolated. They told me all the projects go to [Vila] Malanza, Porto Alegre but they don't stop here, in Ponta Baleia. All of them just pass through. (GOV3)*

*They [projects] don't come here normally. Sometimes, they pass through on the way to Porto Alegre. It's very difficult, here. (FG2)*



Figure 18: The village quintal (center) with the dilapidated laundry area. Source: Lead author's personal archive.

It is no surprise that due to their larger populations, both Vila Malanza and Porto Alegre receive a larger amount of development assistance. An example of this is a government project that installed electricity generators in those two localities. Ponta Baleia was not included in it despite lack of electricity having been identified as one of the key development challenges by the community.

The history of being bypassed by outside investment has led to, in the words of the former local government leader, “an advanced state of precariousness” caused by “a different treatment” the community believes it is receiving compared to its neighbors (GOV1). The resulting deep poverty and infrastructural challenges (for example, see Figures 18 and 20) prevent Ponta Baleia residents from meeting their basic needs.

### Previous experience with development agents

Despite its relative isolation, there have been a number of development initiatives in the village over the past few years, alongside the UNDP adaptation project which installed a solar panel-powered freezer in one of the community’s storage rooms. As mentioned above, the solar freezer was procured in direct response to the complaints of the local *palayés* about their fish frequently perishing before delivery to markets, particularly the ones in the capital city located a two-hour drive away (see Figure 19). That said, the fact that at the time of the research visits the freezer had not been working for an unspecified amount of time created both confusion and frustration among the *palayés*:

*They put the freezer in there, but it doesn’t work. (...) When they told us to try to start the freezer, we tried many times. And we called them back, I don’t know how many times, and nobody answered. (FG2)*



Figure 19: *Palayés* (fish traders) selling the catch of the day at the main fish market in the capital city of São Tomé. Source: Lead author’s personal archive.



Figure 20: Buildings in Ponta Baleia. Source: Lead author’s personal archive.

Second, two local women have reportedly participated in a chicken-breeding program based outside Ponta Baleia. Interviewees were not clear on the specifics of the project because its representatives are said to have selected participants from Ponta Baleia independently:

*When they did the meetings about their chickens, they never called a meeting with everybody. Just the two of them, not the [entire] population. Specific meetings... (...) You understand? They don’t invite any other people to those meetings. (FG1)*

The selective involvement of certain residents leads to further distrust towards outside actors,

as it makes some residents feel more left out of the development process compared to others.

One project that did come to fruition was a local radio station based in Porto Alegre and funded by the European Union. However, residents representing the local area in the Porto Alegre Community Group (discussed below) were initially skeptical of its usefulness, and pointed out the need for an ambulance in the region instead. As reported by a development practitioner present at one of the consultation meetings for this project:

*[The community kept asking] why and why. "Why are you... why are you talking to us about a community radio, (...) is it something we need, are you sure?" And there was a lot of back and forth and the NGO that was carrying out this project had some difficulty in establishing points of contact with the community because they were not happy that this one, this idea was suggested on their behalf to the donor, that is [by the] NGO. So, there was some resistance. (NGO1)*

Eventually, however, local residents agreed to take part in the initiative. For instance, one of the members of the soap-producing association has reportedly used it to look for new group members.

Another issue that defines Ponta Baleia's experience with outside development agents is exemplified by a relatively recent project by the Embassy of Portugal, which planned to install a solar panel to power a computer and TV room in the community shed. The project was supposed to benefit local children and students. However, this plan was later abandoned, supposedly for bureaucratic reasons. This is particularly problematic, as the project representative who had visited the village created expectations that were never met:

*All the children were happy because the man talked to us and gave us guarantees to put in television and other things. The children were happy thinking about this. So he said that he would come with solar panels and one satellite dish... (...) And he said there would be an IT center in the same building. And up until now, nothing. [\*claps hands clean\*] (...) When someone says they will do something, they must do it! But when they go away, they forget. They don't return, anymore. (FG2)*

Finally, Leigos para o Desenvolvimento, a faith-based NGO which sends volunteers to Caué, maintains a strong presence in the village; Leigos volunteers helped establish the dance group and the soap-producing association. This is the only development organization that residents speak of in positive terms – something that will be further explored in the final chapter.

Compounding the local disillusion within the development sector is the fact that every election cycle, Santomean communities are bombarded with campaign promises which rarely materialize. In the words of a local development practitioner, this bears heavily on people's views of politics and politicians:

*People have resistance towards the government, [the] government and [its] officials because they know that they are all politically oriented. All politics in São Tomé is very much partisan-oriented, party-oriented and [there are] witch hunts all the time. And people know that. People [in politics] are not interested in developing the country, they are interested in their... Something that [people] have a fear [of is] that they are more interested in their careers and their personal interest. (NGO1)*

This is confirmed by local residents during the interviews:

*[Answer]: They just come here when the political campaigns happen, and besides that they go straight to Angolares or Porto Alegre and they do nothing here.  
[Question]: So nothing happened after the election?  
[A]: No, nothing. (M2)*

It has been suggested that African parliamentary democracies such as STP suffer from



pervasive pork barreling, whereby direct connections to a village are key for securing government investment (van de Walle, 2009). Ponta Baleia, being a very small community, largely lacks such relationships, leading to promises made during elections that hardly ever come to fruition.

### **Sense of resignation and abandonment**

The community's isolation from mainstream development, combined with a rocky relationship with outside development agents and the government, has created a sense of hopeless resignation and abandonment among most residents:

*We are abandoned here, living like homeless people. (M2)*

This sense of resignation is visible through the way in which Ponta Baleia residents interact with outsiders – with a great deal of caution and distrust, making the village a particularly difficult turf for development managers and government officials. Community members do not believe that consultation meetings are worthwhile because projects seldom consider their needs, requests or demands on a par with those of development managers.

Certain residents express their distrust and frustration with development agents and the government in very blatant terms:

*They take our information and after, they go to the Rio Grande river, shred the papers and throw them into the river. We are just looking around, waiting. "In X days, we will be back." And they've been saying this forever. (FG2)*

*We don't care about UNDP, they don't help. Hell, I have nothing to tell them and I don't give a damn about them. (M1)*

It is thus evident that Ponta Baleians' unwillingness to participate in the adaptation project stems from a long history of isolation, their disillusion with development initiatives, and their overall sense of resignation and abandonment. However, adopting the community's viewpoint leads to an alternative interpretation, according to which it was not the local residents that rejected outside development and adaptation assistance, but, rather, it was the development sector that has consistently rejected Ponta Baleia as a development partner. The relatively better living conditions in neighboring localities are proof that promoting effective development in the region is certainly possible, but the unwillingness or inability of the development agents and the government to address Ponta Baleia's specific challenges – not least due to its small size and thus importance for development agents – has left the community in a high state of poverty and vulnerability to climate impacts.

### **Porto Alegre Community Group**

The Porto Alegre Community Group (*Grupo Comunitário de Porto Alegre*) is a bottom-up initiative started in 2012 by Leigos para o Desenvolvimento and forms part of the organization's 'social dynamization' portfolio. The Group meets on a bimonthly basis in Porto Alegre (see Figure 21) and includes representatives of around thirty local associations, organizations and groups (representing farmers, fishermen, schools, hotels, sports groups, churches, the police, etc.) from Porto Alegre, Vila Malanza, Ponta Baleia and Ilhéu das Rolas. Its stated goal is to provide "space for the exchange of experiences and resources, [and] identification and resolution of community problems" (Leigos para o Desenvolvimento, n.d.). Ponta Baleia residents participate in the Group's meetings on a regular basis. In the words of a local NGO member:

*[I]t was a needed committee. Like, they [local residents] understood that it would be good to have a meeting where we can... they could discuss everything. It's about Ponta Baleia and [Vila] Malanza and Porto Alegre, and the idea is that every association, every group, informal group, or company that works here (...) could meet together and talk about every situation that needs attention or to do something together. (...) It's open to everyone. The idea is that, for instance, these youngsters [\*pointing at a group of young people nearby\*], they can go there. [Any] person can go there and talk about things. (NGO2)*



The Group's success could lie in the way it is set up; it is inclusive and informal, and receives administrative support from Leigos - volunteers take minutes and minimize the bureaucratic burden for those involved. A representative of another NGO also pointed to the proximity of moderators (Leigos volunteers) and the regularity of meetings as factors that have made the group so effective.



Figure 21 : The town of Porto Alegre. Source: Lead author's personal archive.

Despite the deeply-ingrained reluctance towards local collective action in STP (explained further below), the group has been remarkably successful in bringing local people together. It has managed to create an open space for local decision-making, and among its stated achievements are triggering the establishment of a kindergarten in Vila Malanza and a cultural center in Porto Alegre, in addition to holding various neighborhood cleaning and environmental awareness events. Crucially, every year the group prepares a development road map for the region, with members openly discussing and brainstorming various development challengers and priorities:

*And so, they put people to think about what's going on in the community and then they put their priorities in order of importance. And they've been doing that since 2012. So, the priority of 2016 [stems from] maybe 4-5 years of having an opportunity to think about what's going on in the community and formulating their priority for Ponta Baleia. (...) [M]aybe that's the factor [for local resistance], because when UNDP came: "OK, you need this", they say. "No, we've been working on that for four years and we know that we need that." "No, you need this." "No, we need that! Go to hell!" (NGO1, emphasis in original)*

The above mentioned interviewee proceeded to conclude that Ponta Baleia residents:

*were "vaccinated" against a top-down rapport [with development agents]. They want to have a bottom-up approach and if there is a top-down approach, they will block it. (NGO1)*

Through long-standing participation in the Community Group, Ponta Baleia residents have been able to reflect on their collective priorities for development which they were ready to defend if met with reluctance or lack of understanding from outside agents. The Community Group helped them develop an ability to formulate their own interests vis-à-vis outside development agents and self-empowered them to oppose any activities that would ignore those interests. In this, Ponta Baleia, along with its neighboring villages, is relatively unique at the national scale, which helps explain its resistance to the adaptation project.

## Cultural and historical factors

A small number of practitioners pointed to local cultural and historical factors having a certain role in the process, as well. Interviewees mentioned that both fishing communities (as opposed to those focused on farming) and localities in the south of the country were notoriously more difficult to cooperate with. In the case of the latter, the *Angolares* ethnic group, who reportedly make up the majority of Ponta Baleia's population, are seen as particularly skeptical of, if not suspicious towards, outside interventions. Angolares are most likely descendants of slaves who managed to escape plantations in the north part of the island over the centuries (Seibert, 2006). The poorly accessible south was a frequent battleground between them and the Portuguese colonial administration, which partially explains their reluctance to work with people from the capital. However, an alternative, mythical explanation of their origins pertains to a Portuguese slave ship from Angola crashing on the southern shores of São Tomé. And while Angolares have little willingness or interest in rallying around a myth on their common origin, they are nevertheless seen as more "African" (as opposed to "European") by other ethnic groups (forros and Cabo Verdeans) and some development practitioners (Feio, 2008).

On the other hand, a number of interviewees referred to poor social cohesion at the community level across the country when explaining the difficulties of working with local people. The reluctance of Santomeans to cooperate at the local level is arguably a deeply entrenched consequence of the *roça* (plantation) culture, under which all aspects of slaves' and (starting from 1875) indentured workers' lives were controlled 'from cradle to grave' by colonial masters (Seibert, 2006). Similarly, the previously well-established mechanisms of local government were dismantled in the 19th century to make way for a more tightly regulated system of governance on the islands (ibid). This cultural-historical background makes STP a particularly difficult place for development agents focused on collective action:

*Yeah, it's not easy when you are in a collective approach [mindset], you know, because we talk about communities, communities, communities in São Tomé. But it's a false word. I always say that there's no community in São Tomé. (NGO1)*

Communities were described as being rife with family or economic conflicts, and the more senior residents of Ponta Baleia in particular pointed to the intergenerational animosities between older and younger people, describing the latter as having no respect for the elderly. Yet, despite these antagonisms, the community did manage to collectively stand together against the adaptation project. In this context, the ability to determine local priorities and voicing them publicly via the Community Group, combined with the community's deep sense of isolation and abandonment and the residents' frustration with development agents, explains why poor social cohesion did not stifle collective resistance to the project in the first place.

## Systemic factors

The systemic factors that are likely to have contributed to Ponta Baleia's resistance to the adaptation project include the international development aid structure, the design and implementation of the adaptation project, itself, and the country's political context.

### International development aid structure

The interviewed practitioners spoke at length about the current international aid structure, which makes designing dynamic, flexible and context-specific interventions very difficult. Overall, a number of interviewees criticized the project-based approach followed by most large development agencies and NGOs:

*What I think you need is a [problem-based] approach and not a project approach. I think projects should be forbidden. (...) So, you have this cooperative that is really [good]. It has been created with lots of support (...), so it hasn't been created in the last month of the project because the project had to finish and [then] it was abandoned and it failed completely. And this is what happens with the project approach. Projects are not healthy, projects are limited. (UNDP3)*

*[W]e are a project-fed country. We are fed by projects, we live from them... So, we need to be more prepared to work in a project framework or we need to change the project framework altogether, which is something impossible [\*laughs\*]. (NGO1)*

The most serious critique of development projects is, therefore, their short-term nature, which makes them unlikely to achieve long-lasting change locally. To illustrate this argument, the first of the two interviewees quoted above spoke about a successful program that has supported organic cocoa production for the past twenty years, and saw it as a more effective approach to promote long-term local development. In contrast, in the words of the second practitioner, “some projects cannot afford to be patient.” (NGO1)

A closely related issue is the current design architecture of projects, which is highly rigid. One of the reasons UNDP and the government were unable to accommodate Ponta Baleia residents’ request for assistance in renovating their houses – and particularly the roofs (see Figure 22) – was that support of this kind was not part of the project’s remit, despite being a clear priority for the local community. UNDP officials’ hands were effectively tied in this case:

*[Q] Why couldn’t the UNDP project offer [house renovation]? Why did UNDP say ‘No’?*

*[A] Because if the goal of the project (...) is directed at fishermen, fish sellers and farmers – because the characteristics of the zone is agriculture and fishing... So, the goal of UNDP is to focus on these two points: it’s to support farmers and fishermen, so it cannot change the way how the project goes. (GOV2)*

*[A] You will have to find a very interesting excuse to explain why you build houses instead.*

*[Q] To the donor? (...)*

*[A] To the donors, yes, yes. (UNDP2)*



Figure 22: A patched roof in one of the houses in Ponta Baleia. Source: Lead author’s personal archive.





Figure 23: A decrepit laundry basin still in use in Ponta Baleia. Note the broken tap in the wall. Source: Lead author's personal archive.

Therefore, in this case, UNDP and the government were officially unable to amend the project design once they learned about Ponta Baleia residents' priorities. Doing so would have likely created complications at the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) stage, which is outsourced to independent consultants. In informal conversations, practitioners mentioned that changing some activities is sometimes possible, but that this normally does not apply to project outcomes and outputs, which are very difficult to amend once project funding has been approved.

This rigid institutional context should be analyzed against the backdrop of good governance, which stresses accountability and transparency in the management of development funds, not least due to the perceived high levels of corruption in many African countries. However, according to one of the interviewees, 'good governance' should go beyond transparent disbursement of resources:

*Because good governing is not only when one thinks there is transparency. No, no, no. It is not only that. Good governing is not only transparency. Good governing is having a dialogue, openness, engagement, respect, appreciation for every institution and for every citizen. This is how I perceive good governing. (GOV1)*

The current disbursement structure discourages creativity and adaptability in project design and implementation of the kind that was arguably required in the case of Ponta Baleia.



However, UNDP was not only limited in its decisions by donors. The organization also needed to navigate a complex political relationship with its main partner – the national government. As many other large aid agencies, UNDP acts as the government’s arm in local communities, and all its activities must be approved by the lead Ministry. Institutional wrangling is not uncommon. In the case of the adaptation project, the Ministry of Agriculture requested in early 2016 that the project manager be moved to its headquarters from the UNDP Country Office. This illustrates that organizations such as UNDP, even if they embraced a more participatory model for local operations, have relatively limited leeway for pursuing agendas not explicitly supported by the donors or the government.

### Project design

The larger development aid structure aside, the setup of the adaptation project, itself – including its focus, its participation model, and institutional capacity – similarly limited the degree to which it could be seen as relevant for or responsive to the needs of Ponta Baleia residents.

#### *Project focus*

The project was financed by the Least Developed Countries Fund (LDCF) administered by the Global Environment Facility (a World Bank affiliate) under its Climate Change focal area. As such, it was always a climate-change-focused initiative, of which the aim was to “enhance capacities of rural communities (...) to pursue climate resilient livelihood options” (UNDP, 2014). This focus on climate change and building resilience to ensure local residents’ “means of survival” (GOV3) was largely seen as irrelevant to most Ponta Baleians, who wished to address the more immediate development challenges in the community – the poor condition of local houses being one of them. There is some recognition for this fundamental discrepancy between project priorities and community objectives within UNDP:

*[I]f you come [and] start talking about climate change with me and I don’t have food, I don’t have [a] house, I will say to you: “Ah, what are you talking about?!” (UNDP2)*

Despite the awareness of this critical issue among the staff, the priorities pursued by the project had to deal directly with building resilience or promoting adaptation in one way or another. And while it could be argued that ensuring decent living conditions is a prerequisite for creating a sustainable, healthy livelihood, the orthodox approach to adaptation as carried out by large development organizations such as UNDP prioritizes supply-based (e.g. new outputs and technologies) or capacity-building (e.g. skills development and training) interventions that aim to increase local incomes rather than the quality of life of local residents – two distinct development goals that UNDP considers synonymous. In the case of Ponta Baleia, project staff explained that in addition to addressing environmental health risks, the proposed assistance (construction of pigsties) was meant to lead to increased incomes, which the residents could use to renovate their dilapidated houses.

#### *The project’s participation model*

The project outreach component fell short of ensuring meaningful engagement at the local level, and resulted in what could be dubbed “selective participation”. This shortcoming was evident through the project’s community participation strategy which relied on DRPs – interactive consultation events where communities are surveyed on their current needs and challenges (Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014). As mentioned above, local priorities were divided by project staff into social issues and climate change issues (MADR, 2015), with the project committed to only addressing the latter. The arbitrary problematization of local adaptation challenges as strictly environmental rather than social explains the project’s insistence on solutions that are technical or technological by nature.

In the case of Ponta Baleia, one of the solutions proposed by project staff (next to a drainage system) was the construction of pigsties, which was additionally justified by the need to address the poor environmental health in the village that staff believed was necessary to address in the first instance:

*We saw sanitation as a priority. (GOV3, emphasis added)*

The project's failure to engage in meaningful deliberation with the village caused the staff to ignore critical arguments raised by residents against constructing pigsties: lack of local skills to raise animals in captivity, lack of familiarity with potentially new pig breeds, lack of appropriate fodder, and increased likelihood of theft. With regards to the issue of feeding the animals, one community member explained that:

*Breeding pigs is a good idea but finding food for them is a difficult thing. Because, if one person takes this pig to breed, if they don't have coconuts in their lots to give to the pig, it's [as good] as nothing. If these pigs are special, if they don't eat our natural feed and need food that comes from outside... [The] feed, here we don't have it. Our pigs, they can eat bananas, fruit peels, but the pigs from outside, we don't know if they eat our food. Natural food. (FG1)*

Therefore, it needs to be underlined that resistance to the proposed solutions in Ponta Baleia was not based on the poor state of local housing alone, but also stemmed from residents' concerns regarding the exigencies of maintaining the pigsties, and thus the long-term sustainability of the project.

Relatedly, the modality in which the consultation events were carried out was criticized by the interviewed Ponta Baleia residents as largely irresponsible:

*I think they are not interested [in] what we really need. Many times, we talk about the things we need, and I think they never report it. They don't listen to us. There was only one time they listened to us and it was the freezer. (F4)*

*The problem is they don't listen to the community. They come here and they don't listen, and I want to tell them to listen. (M2)*

#### ***Institutional capacity of implementing agencies***

This points to the key aspect of low institutional capacity at the national level for carrying out meaningful participation. Practitioners spoke of particularly limited capacities at government agencies, the absence of business plans for development initiatives and poor capacity to meaningfully engage local communities as some of the key reasons for projects not continuing beyond their original timelines. In the words of an NGO staff member:

*Sometimes, there are projects that come here and they give people things and then they don't work and they don't care about it. I just know that. (NGO2)*

A local resident also pointed out the inability for projects to ensure sustainability in the context of the solar panel installed to power the freezer in Ponta Baleia:

*[T]hey brought it and it's just here. Nothing additional to help it work or to help us. You need some coordination to make things work. The quotes need to be paid. To pay for the people who clean and guard it. (...) [S]o they bring it but they don't take any responsibility for how things work later on; that's a different matter for them. They deliver their project and we don't have conditions here to work with it. (M1)*

In this context, interviewees criticized the lack of response after calling the project representative and the engineer regarding a technical issue with the solar panel that supposedly prevented it from working correctly.

The ability of government agencies and large development agencies to ensure high degree of local interest and involvement in development projects was further questioned by practitioners:

*I believe that when it is an NGO, consultations are done (...) in a different way [than] when it is done by the government and (...) by UNDP. (...) Sometimes what I find is that we don't always have the latest communication skills or techniques or methodologies,*

*(...) and sometimes it seems to me that we go about business-as-usual and we are not innovative and creative enough in involving communities in a way [that] later on you have complete appropriation of your proposition or the resources that you intended to achieve. (...) NGOs are better prepared to go to the field, the good NGOs – and we have [a few] in this country. They have their vocation and structure and the time and the energy and the means (...) to go to communities and spend time there. (UNDP3)*

This view seems to be corroborated by the experience of Ponta Baleia residents with Leigos para o Desenvolvimento, which – as noted above – has reportedly been more positive and productive. In contrast, the power imbalances between government officials and UNDP staff on the one hand, and frequently illiterate rural residents on the other, are not conducive to creating a fruitful and equitable partnership for local development.

As a result of this insufficient ability to engage the recipients of aid, the project failed to create a suitable environment for a meaningful exchange of views and ideas or, as described by the former local government leader, the very “foundation for its implementation” (GOV1). The DRPs can be described as extractive, with project staff surveying the residents for information without engaging in honest deliberation which would have been more likely to prevent the ultimately negative reaction of the community. What adds to this issue is the fact that many residents see external projects as lacking transparency and legitimacy, believing that they arrive in communities with project beneficiaries already selected, as noted earlier.

Relatedly, projects can inadvertently adopt a divide-and-conquer strategy, which not only fails to promote local cohesion but in some circumstances may end up undermining it. In the case of the adaptation project, staff tended to reach out to the community leader in the first instance (which is standard procedure), without however ensuring that the leader engages everyone in the village or that decisions taken during meetings are relayed to those unable to attend. This was an issue in another participating community in the Lobata District, where the local leader cherry-picked attendees for consultation meetings (Mikulewicz 2020). Working with the more connected and usually wealthier individuals – while problematic from the standpoint of addressing climate vulnerability – ultimately benefits projects, as the more economically active groups are more likely to achieve reportable benefits assessed in the monitoring and evaluation phase.

### STP's political context

The disconnect between local needs and national priorities made transparent by the history of the adaptation project can also be explained by the political and institutional context of the country. At the political level, local authorities are notoriously sidelined in the design and implementation of large development projects, despite being closer to the beneficiaries and often having a more nuanced understanding of their needs and expectations. In the case of the adaptation project, the Caué local authority was involved in a largely superficial manner, despite its readiness to get more engaged:

*And how can we have communities [that are] prepared for the development projects? This is only possible when the local authorities, the district assemblies and civil society organizations, the NGOs, can develop preliminary outreach activities and actions that meet the aspirations and priorities of each community. (GOV1)*

Yet, the limited involvement of local authorities in national projects can be explained by the former not having sufficient resources to become engaged in a meaningful manner, as described by a senior UNDP staff member:

*The Câmara [of Caué] is only politics. They have no money. (UNDP1)*

However, it could be argued that this involvement does not necessarily require substantive financial resources, as it could be simply limited to liaising with local communities and briefing national agencies on local issues and expectations. This is particularly important in communities such as Ponta Baleia which have gradually formed specific expectations from



development projects that should be considered by any intervention to avoid a legitimacy crisis of the kind experienced by the adaptation project. Relatedly, local priorities evolve with time, a change that local authorities are often better placed to track than a national agency - even in a country as small as STP.

What compounds the obvious gaps in institutional capacity is financial scarcity with which the project had to grapple with from its very beginning. With only \$4 million USD to distribute among national institutions and 30 local communities, the project was described by one of the high-ranking UNDP staffers as “too ambitious” (UNDP1) and was therefore unable to address the local development challenges in a meaningful manner. Pressure to include 30 communities came from the national government seeking to maximize the initiative’s geographical reach, which some interviewees interpreted as a sign of political expediency.

Related to this politicization of development initiatives is the lack of continuity in national policies and programs. Between 2014 and 2016, the Ministry of Agriculture is said to have promoted a program for renovating rural homes, and carried a limited number of renovations across the country. This short-lived initiative may have however been long enough to create expectations within rural areas, including Ponta Baleia, that local housing infrastructure would be renovated with the government’s help.

As the above section illustrates, Ponta Baleia’s refusal to participate in the adaptation project was shaped by a range of local and systemic factors. This analysis testifies to how complex local development contexts are, and supports the argument of critical climate change scholars that adaptation must be responsive to local needs and thus designed from the bottom-up rather than follow strictly imposed guidelines from funders.

The final section will discuss the recommendations produced by this research project, which can help avoid conflicts of the kind seen in Ponta Baleia and make future adaptation programming more effective and equitable.

## 6. Recommendations

Based on the above analysis of Ponta Baleia's resistance to the UNDP adaptation project, it is possible to make a number of recommendations pertaining to the project's participation model, its overall approach to promoting adaptation, the structure of the development sector and aid, and the needs for future research. These recommendations are a combination of direct suggestions made by participants and the results of the authors' own analysis of the data.

### Overhaul of project participation models

When it comes to the implementation of ongoing projects, the collected data confirms the long-standing arguments in critical development literature on the flaws of current participation models currently pervading the aid sector. In the case of the adaptation project, the specific recommendations refer to the need to engage *all* residents in consultation meetings and improving communication style, which includes ensuring regular contact between the project and the beneficiaries.

#### Consultation meetings

In order to avoid selective participation, additional efforts are required on the part of development managers to ensure that as many residents as possible are included in the meetings pertaining to projects. While it is usually impossible to gather everyone, there are certain measures that could be taken to maximize the number of participants. For instance, the timing of meetings should be aligned with the schedule of local residents rather than project staff. In the case of Ponta Baleia, meetings with the community should have taken place later in the day. However, specific measures to widen local involvement will vary according to context.

Importantly, there are tangible benefits to inviting people who may not benefit from the proposed intervention directly, including a higher level of overall legitimacy at the community level and promoting political equality by involving all those interested in the discussion. In the words of one of the Ponta Baleia residents:

*If a project or a group appears, for example you [the translator] with this white man [Sr. Branco], you are talking with everyone from the community, right? You are talking to everybody in the community: "We're going to do this." The other projects, they speak just with three persons. "You are going to do this; you are going to do that." And most people, they [don't know about it]. They stay home. When the freezer broke, nobody knew about it! We didn't know. I was sitting there. Like, you said to me: "Come and speak with us!" And that's the reason I'm here. (FG1)*

Therefore, project staff should resist the routine procedure of involving only the village elites (leaders and their allies) in the early stages of projects, with the hope that information and resources will be shared downward afterwards. This very often does not happen, due to actions that can be either deliberate or not.

#### Communication style

Some practitioners also suggested that it is not just the involvement of beneficiaries that matters, but also the quality of communication between them and the projects in which they take part. In the view of one of the NGO employees:

*It's the way you bring things up because I (...) would think that if UNDP had approached Ponta Baleia in a different way, they might have even accepted to do their pig farms. (NGO1)*

Therefore, the framing of the intervention and the language used to do so also seem to be of key importance. While not a universal practice by any means, it is not uncommon for project staff members to fail to consider the deep power differentials between them and the beneficiaries (Mikulewicz, 2020). This may manifest itself in their choice of words or tone during conversations and meetings with residents, or at the general level preclude aid recipients from being seen as equal partners by decision-makers and project staff. While there is very little

practitioners and community members can immediately do to alter these power differentials, there are many ways in which their impact could be attenuated. This could take the form of training outreach staff in communication and collaboration with beneficiaries in a respectful and equitable manner, and stressing the need for self-reflecting on one's own practice. Importantly, this knowledge does not need to come from outside, as it is possible to draw from the skills and experience of practitioners at the national level (particularly those working for community-based organizations or locally-oriented NGOs) who are more in tune with local political dynamics and culture.

A key source of frustration for Ponta Baleia residents was the lack of follow-up on the part of UNDP or government staff after meetings or activities had taken place, as the community did not have a reliable channel of communication with the project. As mentioned above, the solar panel installed to power the freezer broke down shortly upon installation. However, the community was unaware of what was being done at UNDP to address this issue despite repeatedly attempting to contact the Country Office. Moreover, residents were not kept informed about the progress of the project over the years, which demonstrates the need to incorporate their representatives in the monitoring and evaluation of such initiatives. Similarly, local authorities became actively involved in the project only after the community had refused to participate, arguably by the time it was too late.

Here, the possibility to involve agricultural extension workers in Caué who work closely with Ponta Baleians early on was a missed opportunity to create a bridge between the project and its beneficiaries. Other creative methods to maintain communication include the use of mobile phones or social media, which are widely used by the residents, or mobilizing the Porto Alegre Community Group as a platform to liaise with the village. In any case, communication methods need to be agreed on jointly with local residents to ensure they are both relevant and realistic.

### Overhaul of the approach to project design, implementation and monitoring

Many factors that led to local resistance to the UNDP project go beyond the way in which it communicated with the residents of Ponta Baleia. What added to its low level of legitimacy is the top-down manner in which such interventions are designed and implemented (despite the official discourse suggesting the opposite).

#### Flexibility

First, the project was primarily accountable to the national government and the donor (Global Environment Facility, GEF), rather than the local communities in which it intervened. This forced project staff to strictly adhere to the project document written by an international consultant from Portugal supported by three national consultants. In the end, the project was unable to shift its focus to reflect the changing local needs, as managers did not believe it would be allowed, particularly by the donor. Lack of inflexibility of this kind, though it reflects a high level of commitment of the development sector to transparency and accountability, serves little purpose and ultimately leads to wasted resources in terms of funds, time and trust. Donors should consider revising the degree to which local projects can adjust the stated outcomes and outputs if local development or adaptation priorities have shifted since project approval (or had not been considered or properly identified to begin with).

#### Local understandings of vulnerability and adaptation

Relatedly, development actors must not impose their own understandings of what vulnerability and adaptation to climate change mean for the people affected by its impacts. When entering local communities, project staff should not hold preconceived notions of what residents require to increase their adaptive capacity. Instead, careful attention to the local knowledge on climate- and development-related challenges and meaningful deliberation on potential solutions with the recipients of aid should guide adaptation interventions at the local level. Moreover, the artificial distinction made by the UNDP project staff between social development priorities and adaptation or climate priorities goes against research suggesting that often, the two are one and the same (Ayers & Dodman, 2010; OECD, 2012). For instance, it could be argued that assistance with renovating local houses would have translated into higher levels of productivity and overall well-being, which could ultimately lead to higher incomes (the project's key goal). It would also create a relationship of trust between UNDP, the national government and local residents, whose explicit needs would have been heard and addressed. Given the current design



and implementation architecture of GEF-funded development projects, this kind of flexibility is, bureaucratically, out of the question.

### **Project activities: Quality over quantity**

A number of interviewees from Ponta Baleia, local NGOs and local government observed that the government and its large development partners should place emphasis on the quality rather than the quantity of their activities. This pertains to both financial resources and project duration. In the view of the local government representative:

*Sometimes, you don't need so many resources, but you need political will, know how to be, how to do, and respect the people. And sometimes, with few resources you can make much more than with great sums that sometimes the country receives as aid, and that aren't translated into results for the communities. (GOV1)*

In particular, the approach taken by Leigos para o Desenvolvimento, which does not require a large financial investment, was appreciated by local residents:

*Leigos, they are a group of volunteers. They just come to get our information, they take information on the lack of water, we don't have a good [access] road, we don't have any good things or houses, or how to do meetings. They went to those houses and took our information, our requests. They take it to the project, to the government, and ask for help. And this is how they work here in Porto Alegre. (FG1)*

However, what Leigos may lack in terms of financial resources, they make up in terms of time commitment to the communities in which they work. While the volunteers rotate on a regular basis, the overall approach to development and the relationships with residents remain, allowing to build mutual trust, respect and understanding. As explained by one of the residents in Ponta Baleia:

*[Leigos] have been here for a long time and they created a group for women, and they worked with women from Porto Alegre, [Vila] Malanza and women from Ponta Baleia, so we started to organize small meetings every Sunday at 1pm. (...) One week here, one week in [Vila] Malanza. We had these meetings and with Leigos, we had many activities. We learned from them a bit, step by step. (F4)*

Otherwise, as argued by other residents, projects lack sustainability and unravel shortly after their official completion because the community may lack the willingness or capacity to continue without external support:

*[UNDP's] idea is to have some projects, deliver them here and leave it. No care, no guard. No matter if the community has the means or not. That's it. (M1)*

It was recognized by the interviewed practitioners that developing the kind of relationship and capacity required to ensure long-term success of a project (i.e. beyond the usual reporting timelines) calls for continued engagement at the community level. In the case of the adaptation project, there were a few consultation meetings scattered across a period of three years. In some cases, residents had to be reminded by the research team what UNDP is and of the project the organization had brought to the village. Bearing in mind that in the case of the adaptation project a 'deep', long-term engagement with each of the 30 communities involved was virtually impossible due to financial and time constraints (and to a lesser degree the project team's capabilities), the argument for a higher level of involvement of local authorities and extension workers to create productive relationships with local communities appears even stronger.

### **Development and adaptation aid reform**

At the higher level, research findings confirm the view of some practitioners calling for the abandonment of the project-based development model and switching to a more long-term, comprehensive problem- or program-based approach.

For example, the program supporting the cocoa cooperative was mentioned by one of the practitioners as an example of a successful quality-over-quantity initiative that had been active for many years and managed to create long-term capacity at the local level. This demonstrates the value of continuous support over a long period of time, as opposed to short, resource-intensive projects to promote local adaptive capacity. This recommendation comes from the recognition that adaptation efforts do not have to address climate impacts directly but can also build local preparedness in a more indirect manner. This could involve a higher reliance on economic and social support programs (including social protection programs) and further decentralization of aid.

### **Social protection programs**

In this context, due attention should be placed on the role of social protection programs for promoting adaptation, a topic of a growing number of studies and publications over the last few years (Tenzing, 2020). Of particular importance here is what scholars studying the relationship between adaptation and social protection have dubbed ‘adaptive social protection’ (ASP) (Davies & Leavy, 2007). ASP seeks to maximize the impact of social protection on recipients’ adaptive capacity as well as prepare such programs for the impacts of climate change. There is a growing recognition that these links need to be further studied and understood by policymakers (Tenzing, 2020), with some practical recommendations on ASP implementation already available (Costella et al., 2017; Jones et al., 2010). Organizations such as the Food and Agriculture Organization (2019), the German Development Institute (Aleksandrova, 2019), and the World Food Programme (Solórzano & Cárdenes, 2019) have recently started to consider how social protection may aid in promoting local adaptation, for example through social assistance, social insurance and labor market intervention. Similarly, the World Bank has recognized social protection as a potential tool for fostering resilience in its Africa Climate Business Plan (World Bank, 2015).

### **Decentralization of aid**

The practical implications of moving to program-based interventions include a higher reliance on national agencies in identifying and supporting the recipients of aid, managing the funds and ensuring compliance and accountability, among other tasks. These have been known to be serious issues for many governments in LMICs, and additional support would likely be required to complement the existing institutional capacity to deliver long-term social programs. An interim option is to deliver them jointly with development organizations, including NGOs, which may be able to complement governments’ expertise.

Moreover, the decentralization of aid should occur in at least two interrelated ways: through increased flexibility of how funds are spent and a higher degree of power afforded to the local government and, more importantly, local communities. Changing the focus of the project if circumstances demand it must be possible, and given the fact that adaptation needs are highly context-specific and constantly evolve, this kind of flexibility is essential. Second, local communities need to be brought into the decision-making structure at much higher levels than it is practiced now. They should cease to be seen as ‘beneficiaries’ and instead treated as equal partners whose lives and livelihoods will be affected not only by climate change impacts but also the ways in which their governments and the development sector respond to them.

This recommendation brings a number of important implications, particularly at the design and M&E stages. Projects should be re-imagined and restructured to work from the ‘ground-up’. Therefore, it is recommended that the reliance on external consultants is abandoned or reduced in favor of supporting extension service workers and ‘frontline’ development workers who have a more nuanced understanding of local community needs and particularities (as was the case of the UNDP adaptation project). Communities should be able to validate *or invalidate* the design and implementation models of projects before they are submitted for funding, and moreover have the option to change their priorities once approval has been granted. The design of projects should incorporate realistic expectations on how much time it actually takes to foster local interest, engagement and ownership, even if it means limiting the number of benefiting localities. Clear communication channels should be mutually agreed on and established between projects and the communities in which they operate (if necessary, projects should earmark specific funds for maintaining these channels). Finally, local residents and direct beneficiaries of aid should be involved in M&E activities, their level of satisfaction being a key

indicator of project success. A more radical reform here would entail making project staff accountable to the recipients of aid in addition to the funders, which would improve local representation and overall project accountability.

While the above observation on the quality over the quantity of adaptation interventions does suggest that technological or infrastructure-heavy solutions such as solar freezers or local irrigation systems may not always be effective or reflective of local expectations, it should not be understood as a call for the development sector to move away from promoting technological advancement. At the higher level, rural areas in sub-Saharan Africa such as Caué can (and should) benefit greatly from new technologies, especially in the agriculture, water and sanitation, transport and energy sectors. However, the question remains whether this should be done by means of strictly time-delimited, localized projects or through larger-scale investment at the national level (or perhaps through a mixture of both approaches).

The bottom line here is that it is not the technology that is often the problem, but the way in which it is selected and deployed. This should be done in a co-productive manner *with* the communities rather than *for* them since, as observed by one of the interviewed managers at UNDP, both sides stand to benefit from a relationship of this kind:

*[W]hen it comes to the diagnostic phase, what you want etc., [there is] also a mixture of responsibility, I would say, between who is offering (who is normally not very creative) and who is demanding or has very little exposure of what can be demanded because they... this is an island. (UNDP3)*

Therefore, what is recommended here is not a complete transfer of decision-making powers to local communities who may not have access to all the knowledge and resources that could potentially benefit them. Rather, co-production through shared responsibility and an exchange of knowledge and experiences is more likely to lead to the creative solutions often required by complex development and adaptation challenges locally. Evidence collected by the research team suggests that communities are acutely aware of their shortcomings when it comes to technical knowledge and resource base.

### Future research directions

Future research is recommended on the localized dynamics of both planned and autonomous adaptation.

First, climate change research and practice have been traditionally dominated by uncritical, positivist approaches that view adaptation as something unquestionably beneficial. The case of Ponta Baleia demonstrates that this is certainly not the case. The adaptation project replicated the mistakes of past interventions by largely ignoring local voices and instead meticulously following its funder-approved logical framework. Meanwhile, adaptation is a contentious process, which leads to winners and losers (Eriksen et al., 2015; Mikulewicz, 2019; Taylor, 2013, 2014). While not the focus of this particular study, evidence suggests that the levels of wealth, power and influence varies among the residents of Ponta Baleia, with some positioned to benefit from adaptation initiatives better than others. In general, new practical approaches are needed to ensure that development projects, policies and programs related to climate change are designed with climate justice at their core (see: Anderson, 2013; Bond, 2012; Gardiner, 2011; Goodman, 2009; Jafry et al., 2019; Thorp, 2014). This can be done by critical research that exposes and investigates the various kinds of inequalities between communities and development organizations as well as within communities themselves that govern how people's lives and livelihoods are affected by rapidly growing climatic changes (Mikulewicz, 2018). In general, there is more focused research needed on the relationship between adaptation, development and climate justice.

Second, the traditionally techno-managerial focus of adaptation research and practice (Mikulewicz & Taylor, 2019; Nightingale et al., 2019) should be complemented by more people-oriented approaches which focus on the lived experiences of climate change. Interdisciplinary research involving humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, health and life sciences, and engineering could be mobilized to achieve this goal. In the case of Ponta Baleia, it



was arguably UNDP and the national government's insistence on techno-managing adaptation that, ultimately, led the community to reject the solutions proposed by the project. As mentioned above, local residents need to become more involved in the design, implementation and M&E stages of development projects in order to ensure co-production of solutions. This will require a baseline level of awareness on the part of development and adaptation managers pertaining to local understandings of climate change and the solutions to adaptation challenges, many of which may be based on the ecological and social knowledge of the participants. Participatory action research (PAR) that is open to alternative knowledges and understandings of adaptation, in particular, can generate the evidence to build this essential awareness and help decolonize adaptation knowledge and practice in lower- and middle-income countries such as São Tomé and Príncipe.

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